

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 4079

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, MILI, NU
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT'S SON, MAJOR SOMOZA

1. ON AUGUST 29 DCM AND RICHARD FEINBERG OF S/P CALLED ON MAJOR ANASTASIO (TACHITO) SOMOZA, PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S SON, AND HEAD OF THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN BASIC INFANTRY TRAINING SCHOOL. THE MEETING TOOK PLACE IN TACHITO'S OFFICE/LIVING QUARTERS ON THE TRAINING SCHOOL GROUNDS, LOCATED ONLY YARDS BELOW THE "BUNKER," WHERE PRESIDENT SOMOZA MAINTAINS HIS MANAGUA HEAD-QUARTERS.

2. PLOT AGAINST PRESIDENT SOMOZA. MAJOR SOMOZA SAID THAT THE PLOT AGAINST HIS FATHER HAD NOT BEEN SERIOUS. ALTHOUGH 19 OFFICERS AND 21 ENLISTED MEN HAD BEEN ARRESTED INITIALLY, ONLY FOUR OFFICERS, SIX ENLISTED MEN AND TWO CIVILIANS HAD BEEN DIRECTLY INVOLVD. THE OTHERS THAT HAD BEEN DETAINED WERE ONLY "CLAIMED SUPPORTERS" WHOSE NAMES WERE USED FALSELY BY THE LEADER OF THE COUP PLOT IN AN ATTEMPT TO GAIN MORE FOLLOWERS. THE LEADER, LT COL. BERNARDINO LARIOS, AN ENGINEER TRAINED AT GON EXPENSE IN BRAZIL, HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO THE NATIONAL LIGHT AND POWER
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COMPANY (ENALUF), WHERE THE CIVILIANS ALSO WORKED. THE DETAINED OFFICERS AND MEN HAD BEEN CAREFULLY QUESTIONED AND THOSE NOT INVOLVED HAD BEEN RELEASED AND RETURNED TO THEIR POSTS. PRESIDENT SOMOZA HAD SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH THESE OFFICERS AND LATER WITH THE ENLISTED MEN WHO HAD BEEN INITIALLY ARRESTED. ACCORDING TO TACHITO, THESE WERE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL MEETINGS IN WHICH EXCHANGES OF MUTUAL TRUST AND AFFECTION LED TO TEARS ON THE PAR

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OF ALL CONCERNED, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT AND HIS SON. TACHITO STRESSED THAT NONE OF THE PEOPLE DIRECTLY INVOLVED WERE REGULAR ARMY, BUT RATHER TECHNICIANS AND TECHNOCRATS. THE LEADER, HE SAID, HAD BEEN TALKING TO OPPOSITIONISTS AND HIS INTENT WAS TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS HEAD OF THE GUARDIA AFTER THE OPPOSITION TOOK OVER. WHEN ASKED WHAT PUNISHMENT WOULD BE GIVEN TO THE PLOTTERS, TACHITO SAID "KNOWING MY DAD, I BELIEVE HE WILL LET THEM OFF FREE, THE ONLY PUNISHMENT BEING THEIR REMOVAL FROM THE GN."

3. DEPARTURE OF PRESIDENT SOMOZA IN 1981. MAJOR SOMOZA SAID THAT HIS FATHER HAD MET RECENTLY WITH SENIOR OFFICERS OF THE GUARDIA NACIONAL AND IN FORCEFUL TERMS EXPLAINED CLEARLY TO THEM THAT HE DEFINITELY INTENDED TO LEAVE OFFICE IN 1981. HE STRESSED TO THOSE PRESENT THAT THEY MUST BE CLEAR IN THEIR MINDS THAT "SOMEONE ELSE WILL BE OCCUPYING THIS CHAIR AFTER 1981." AS FOR HIMSELF, TACHITO SAID THAT HE PLANS TO OBTAIN A LEAVE OF ABSENCE FROM THE GUARDIA AFTER 1981 FOR TWO YEARS IN ORDER TO OBTAIN A MASTER'S DEGREE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION FROM HARVARD UNIVERSITY (HE ALREADY HAS AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE FROM HARVARD). FOLLOWING THAT, HE WOULD RETURN TO THE GUARDIA AND DO AS MANY SENIOR GUARDIA OFFICERS DO, E.E., REMAIN IN THE MILITARY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MANAGING THEIR BUSINESS ENTERPRISES. TACHITO SAID THAT HIS FATHER HAD DONE MUCH TO BENEFIT NICARAGUA ECONOMICALLY. HE CITED SPECIFICALLY A SUGAR REFINERY OPERATION ON THE EAST COAST. WHILE THE REFINERY HAD

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BEEN LOSING MONEY FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, IT HAD PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE EMPLOYMENT AND IS NOW BEGINNING TO SHOW A PROFIT.

4. THE OPPOSITION. MAJOR SOMOZA REITERATED MANY TIMES DURING THE CONVERSATION HIS STRONG PERSONAL WISH THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD GET TOGETHER AND FIND A LEADER. "THEY ARE VERY NICE PEOPLE," HE SAID. "MANY OF THEM ARE BRILLIANT MEN AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS, BUT THEY ARE NOT POLITICIANS AND THEY REFUSE TO WORK HARD AT POLITICS." "I CAMPAIGNED FOR MY FATHER WHEN I WAS 18 YEARS OLD AND I KNOW HOW HARD POLITICIANS MUST WORK TO BE SUCCESSFUL. WE CANNOT HAVE DEMOCRATIC CHANGE IN NICARAGUA UNLESS THEY GET OUT AND BUILD REAL POLITICAL PARTIES WITH SOME REALLY POPULAR SUPPORT". "INSTEAD," HE SAID, "THEY CALL FOR A STRIKE THAT IS EXTREMELY DAMAGING TO NICARAGUA'S ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION." IT WILL NOT BE SUCCESSFUL AND CERTAINLY NOT LEAD TO THE DEPARTURE OF MY FATHER." "THERE WERE MANY BUSINESS PEOPLE BOTH LARGE AND SMALL WHO DO NOT WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GENERAL STRIKE, BUT WHO ARE BEING FORCED TO CLOSE BY THREATS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE THAT THEY AND/OR THEIR ESTABLISHMENTS WILL BE BOMBED OR BURNED OUT. MANY OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE THINK THAT ALL OF THIS IS JUST A GAME, BUT WHEN SOMEONE GETS KILLED, THEN THEY REALIZE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THEIR

ACTS." HE CITED JINOTEPE AS AN EXAMPLE WHERE A PERSON HAD BEEN KILLED AND THE FIGHTING HAS STOPPED AND ALL IS QUIET.

5. THE GUARDIA. MAJOR SOMOZA SAID THAT THE GUARDIA NACIONAL IS PRIMARILY COMPRISED OF PEOPLE COMING FROM THE POOREST OF POOR IN NICARAGUA. THEY ARE UNEDUCATED AND ARE SADLY LACKING IN THE ABILITY TO DEAL PROPERLY WITH THE GENERAL POPULACE. "THE MAIN PURPOSE OF MY SCHOOL IS TO INSTILL IN THE TRAINEES A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE POPULACE AT LARGE AND TO TEACH THEM PUBLIC RELATIONS, AS WELL AS TO GIVE THEM EXCELLENT MILITARY TRAINING. THE SCHOOL, INCLUDING LIVING QUARTERS FOR OFFICERS AND MEN, IS DESIGNED ALONG LINES SIMILAR TO U.S. TRAINING SCHOOLS. IN ADDITION, WE ARE TEACHING THEM TO READ AND WRITE, AND WE ARE CONDUCTING AN ACCREDITED NIGHT SCHOOL TO ENABLE

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THEM TO GET A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE. I AM CONSTANTLY TELLING THEM NOT TO THREATEN THE GENEAL PUBLIC, BUT TO SAY, FOR EXAMPLE, 'PAR-DON THE BOTHER, BUT MAY I SEE YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE, PLEASE,' RATHER THAN MAKING DEMANDS WITH WEAPONS WAVING AROUND DANGEROUSLY."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 4079

6. MAJOR ZOMOZA SAID THAT CURRENT PLANS ARE TO EXPAND THE GUAR-

DIA FROM THE PRESENT 8,000 TO 15,000 IN THE NEXT YHREE YEARS.
THE GOAL IS TO HAVE ONE GUARDIA FOR EACH 500 OF URBAN POPULATION.
"IN THE PAST, HE SAID, "THE GUARDIA WAS CONTENT TO SIT IN THEIR
SLEEPY GUARD POSTS AND RAKE IN GRAFT, BUT THOSE TIMES ARE GONE
FOREVER. EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT WE HAVE TO HAVE MORE MEN
OUT ON THE BEAT, AND WE MUST ESTABLISH SUBSTATIONS IN POPULATED
AREA TO PROTECT AGAINST VIOLENCE. THE MONIMBO BARRIO IN
MASAYA, HE SAID, IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. IN THE PAST, A FEW TERRORIST
ELEMENTS COULD GET AWAY WITH TERRORIZING THE ENTIRE BARRIO
POPULATION. NOW THERE IS A GN SUBSTATION IN MONIMBO,AND
THE BARRIO AS WELL AS MASAY AS A WHOLE IS NOW QUIET AND PEACEFUL.
TACHITO ALSO STRESSED THE NEED FOR A POLICE ACADEMY. "OUR
TROOPS ARE GIVEN EXCELLENT MILITARY TRAINING BUT THEY ARE
NOT TRAINED FOR POLICE OPERATIONS." HE NOTED THAT NICARAGUA
HAS FEWER MILITARY MEN PER CAPITA THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN
CENTRAL AMERICA. LAUGHINGLY, HE SAID "THIS STRIKE WILL AT
LEAST DO SOME GOOD. NOW, WHENEVER MY FATHER IS ACCUSED OF OWNING
70 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY, HE CAN RESPOND BY SAYING, "THEN, HOW
COME THE STRIKE WAS SO SUCCESSFUL?"

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7. PERSONAL. TACHITO SAID THAT BECAUSE HE IS HIS FATHER'S SON,
PEOPLE THINK HE IS SOME SORT OF HORRIBLE BEAST. WHEN HE WOULD
MEET GIRLS, HE HAD A HARD TIME INITIALLY CONVINCING THEM THAT
HE WAS JUST AN ORDINARY GUY. HE SAID HE HAD NOT PLANNED TO ENTER
THE MILITARY AND WAS BROUGHT IN AS A SPECIAL SERVICES OFFICER
WITH THE RANK OF CAPTAIN TO TAKE CHARGE OF FOOD RELIEF
SUPPLIES DURING THE EARTHQUAKE. THE PRESIDENT THOUGHT HE HAD
DONE A GOOD JOB AND WANTED HIM TO CONTINUE BUT HE, TACHITO,
DID NOT WANT TO BE AN OFFICER WITHOUT EARNING HIS BARS OR
WITHOUT PROPER CREDENTIALS. CONSEQUENTLY, HE WAS SENT TO VAR-
IOUS MILITARY SCHOLLS AND BASES IN THE UK, INCLUDING SANDHURST,
AS WELL AS BASES IN THE U.S. "NOW I HAVE ALL MY TICKETS
PUNCHED. FURTHERMORE, I HAVE DEVELOPED A KEEN PERSONEL INTEREST
IN TRAINING AND IN LEADING MEN." "I LOVE IT," HE SAID.
"I ENJOY RELATING TO THE MEN. THE NICARAGUAN ARMY, HE
SAID, IS A LEFT-WING RATHER THAN A RIGHT-WING ARMY IN THE SENSE
THAT THEY ARE MORE WILLING TO CONFRONT A RICH BOY THAN TO CON-
FRONT A POOR ONE."

8. COMMENT: TACHITO WAS EXTREMELY OPEN, FRIENDLY AND RELAXED,
AND WE WERE IMPRESSED BY HIS HIGH DEGREE OF POLITICAL
SOPHISITICATION. HE REMINDED US VERY MUCH OF HIS FATHER IN HIS
NATURAL TASTE FOR LEADERSHIP, HIS BRAVADO MIXED WITH AN ARROGANT
DEPRECIATION OF THE OPPOSITION, AND HIS USE OF AMERICAN
SLANG AND SWEAR WORDS; ALTHOUGH HE APPEARED SOMEWHAT MORE
SINCERE AND MODERN. HE APPEARED FULLY IN COMMAND OF HIMSELF AND
OF HIS POSITION IN THE GUARDIA; HIS ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT
SITUATION WAS FULL

OF INSIGHTS, BUT WAS WITHOUT A CLEAR REMEDY
TO THE INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE GENERAL STRIKE AND
VIOLENCE IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.
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